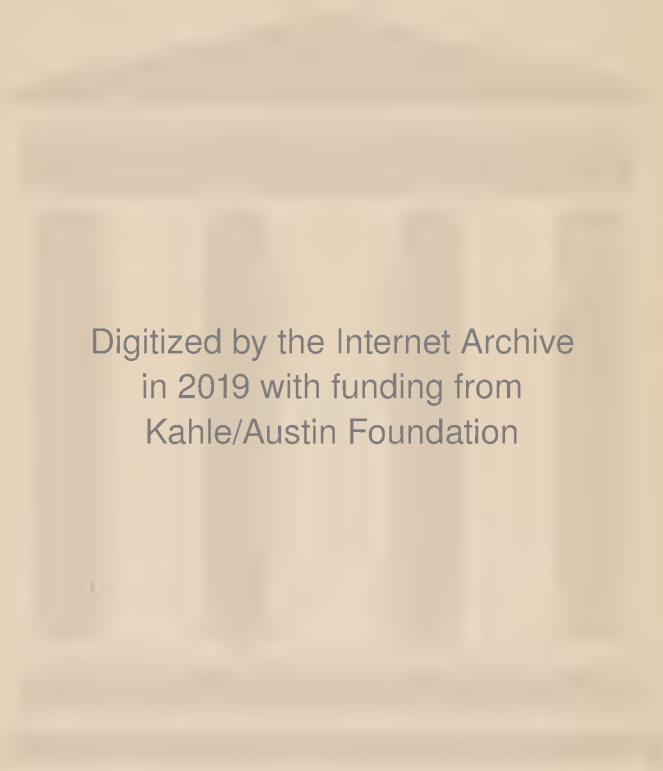
PS
8463
.855B4
1900

BEYOND THE MARSHES

RALPH CONNOR



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2019 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

https://archive.org/details/beyondmarshes0000conn

BEYOND THE MARSHES

IDEAL MESSAGES

A SERIES of booklets for friend to send to friend, having in mind the conveying of a special word for a specific occasion. The elegant manner of production and the genuine worth of the messages fully justify the title of the series, for the complete books are assuredly "ideal."

Old English paper boards, embossed, each, net, 25 cents.

1. **Beyond the Marshes.** By Ralph Connor. A Word of Encouragement.
2. **The Bruised Reed and the Broken Heart.** By Newell Dwight Hillis. A Word on the Uses of Adversity.
3. **For Eyes that Weep.** By Samuel G. Smith. A Word of Comfort to Those Bereaved of Little Children.
4. **He's Coming To-morrow.** By Harriet Beecher Stowe. A Word on the Coming of Christ.
5. **For Hearts that Hope.** By James G. K. McClure, D. D. A Word about Heaven.
6. **Unto Him.** By Bishop John H. Vincent. A Simple Word about Coming to Jesus Christ.

BEYOND THE MARSHES

BY

RALPH CONNOR

AUTHOR OF "BLACK ROCK" AND
"THE SKY PILOT"

FLEMING H. REVELL COMPANY

CHICAGO NEW YORK TORONTO

1900

PS 8462 .B55B4 190

Copyrighted, 1900
By Fleming H. Revell Company

BEYOND THE MARSHES

HE missionary of the Bonjour field found me standing bag in hand upon the railway platform watching my train steam away to the east. He is glad to see me. I am of his own kind, and there are so few of his kind about that his welcome is strong and warm. He is brown and spare and tough-looking. For six months he has driven along the pitching trails and corduroy roads, drenched by rains, scorched by suns, and pursued by the flies. As to the flies there is something to be said. They add much to the missionary's

244378

burden, and furnish unequaled opportunity for the exercise of the Christian graces of patience and self-control. In early spring they appear, and throughout the whole summer they continue in varying forms, but in unvarying persistence and ferocity. There are marsh flies, the bulldogs, "which take the piece right out," the gray wings, the blue devils (local name), which doubtless take several pieces right out, the mosquitoes, unsleeping, unmerciful, unspeakable, the sand flies, which go right in and disappear, and the black flies.

"When do *they* go away?" I asked a native.

"Oh, them black fellows go away on snow-shoes."

These each and all have taken a nip and a suck from the missionary as he pushed on by night and by day through their savage territory. I glance at him, and sure enough they seem to have got all the juice out of him, but they have left the sinew and the bone. His nerve, too, is all there, and his heart is sound and "under his ribs," which one of his admiring flock considers the right spot.

It is Saturday afternoon, and we are to drive to the farthest of his three stations to be ready for the Communion Service there, at half-past ten to-morrow morning.

"Where does it lie?" I ask.

"Oh, away beyond the Marshes," was the answer. Every one evidently knows where the Great Marshes are.

But first we must drink a delicious cup of tea from a brave young Scotchwoman, who has learned the trick of making a home for her husband and babies amid the limitations of Canadian wilds, little like the Edinburgh home where she herself was a baby, and which she left not so very long ago.

Then we must take a look at the new manse of which the missionary feels he has the right to be modestly proud, for it is mostly the work of his own hand. He, like his great Master, is a carpenter, and day and

night in the pauses of his preaching and visiting and studying, he has wrought at it, getting such help as he can, till there it stands, among the trees, the little cottage manse, announcing to all that the mission has come to stay. The *front room,* with writing-desk, book-shelf, table, all of the missionary's making, does for reception and dining room, study, and parlor. Behind it is the kitchen, with ingenious cupboards; and opening off from this the bedroom, five by seven, with bedstead and washstand, both home-made, and both nailed fast to the wall. Altogether a snug little, tight little house, going a long way to content one with being a bachelor.

And now we hitch up Gold-

dust, and are off through the glorious yellow light and purple haze of this September afternoon. Golddust is the missionary's horse, and evidently the missionary's weakness. His name, and as his owner thinks his speed, his spirit, and other characteristics, he inherits from his sire, Old Golddust of Western racing fame. Old Golddust, if he has transmitted his characteristics, must have been a horse of singular modesty, for his son continues resolutely unwilling throughout this drive to make any display of his nobler qualities. By an extraordinary piece of good fortune, due to an evil but unfair report of Golddust in his young days, "they didn't know how to handle him," the missionary had bought

him for twenty-five dollars! One result of the deal has been an unlimited confidence on the part of the missionary in his own horse-dealing instinct. It is quite true that Golddust has not always shown his present mild and trustful disposition. Indeed, the missionary goes on to tell how, being loaned for a day to a brother missionary up west, the horse had returned in the evening much excited, but not much the worse, with a pair of shafts dangling at his heels. The missionary brother did not appear till the day following, and then in a shocking bad temper. "He was a Methodist brother, and didn't understand horses"; and the happy, far-away look in the face of his present owner led me to doubt

whether that day's exploit had lowered Golddust in his estimation.

Meantime we are drinking deep of the delights of this mellow afternoon. On either side of our trail lie yellow harvest fields, narrow, like those of eastern Canada, and set in frames of green poplar bluffs that rustle and shimmer under the softly going wind. Then on through *scrub* we go, bumping over roots and pitching through holes, till we suddenly push out from the scrub, and before us lie the Marshes. There they sweep for miles away, with their different grasses waving and whispering under the steady blowing breeze, first the red-top, then as the soil grows wet the blue-joint and the

swamp grass, and out of the standing water the dark green reeds, and farthest in the tall, wild cane bowing its stately, tasseled head. These red-top and blue-joint reaches are the haylands of the settlers about.

Skirting the edge of the Marshes, we push again through straggling scrub, then past more marshes, and into woods where we follow a winding trail till it leads us into a little clearing. In the center of the clearing stands a cluster of log buildings—stables of different kinds, milk-house, the old shanty, and at a little distance the new house, all looking snug and trim. Through the bars we drive into the yard filled with cattle, for the milking time is on.

A shy lad of ten, with sunburned, freckled face and good blue eyes, comes forward and is greeted as "Donald" by the missionary.

"Hello, Donald, how are you?" I ask, opening the conversation. Donald looks at me and is inaudible, meanwhile unhitching Golddust with marvelous rapidity.

"How many cattle have you, Donald?" I venture again.

Donald evidently considered this a reasonable question, for he answers in delicious Scotch:

"Abou-e-t the-r-r-h-ty."

What a pity we can find no spelling to reproduce that com-

bination of guttural and aspirate and the inimitable inflection of voice. It is so delightful that I ask him again, and again the answer comes with even more emphasis upon guttural and aspirate, and an added curve to the inflection:

"Abou-e-t the-r-r-h-ty."

My heart goes out to him, and watching his neat, quick work with Golddust, I begin to understand the look of thrift about the yard. It is the mark of the "weel daein" Scot.

We go up to the door of the new log house. Before the door are two broad, flat stones washed clean. "Scotch again," I say to myself. Had I not seen them

in many a Scotch village in front of the little stone cottages, thatched and decked with the climbing rose!

The door is opened by Mrs. McPhail. That is not her name, of course. I am not going to outrage the shy modesty of that little woman by putting her name in bold print for all the world to see. A dear little woman she is, bowed somewhat with the burden of her life, but though her sweet face is worn and thin, it is very bright, and now it is aglow with welcome to her friend the missionary. She welcomes me, too, but with a gentle reserve. She is ready enough to give of her heart's wealth, but only to those she has learned to trust. And my friend has gained

a full reward for his six months' work in that he has won this woman's willing trust. When the flush called up by the greeting dies, I see how pale she is, and I wonder how the winds and frosts and fierce suns have left so little trace upon the face of a Manitoba farmer's wife. I understand this later, but not now.

When she was a girl, her hair was thick and fair, but now it is white and thin, and is drawn smoothly back and fastened in a decent little knot behind. Her eyes, once bright and blue, are blue still, but faded, for tears, salt and hot, have washed out the color. She wears a flannel dress, simple and neat; and the collar at the neck and the lace-

edged kerchief at the breast and the tidy dantiness of all about her make her a picture of one who had been in her youth "a weel brocht-up lass."

Her house is her mirror. The newly plastered, log-built walls are snow-white, the pine floor snow-white, and when the cloth is spread for tea, it, too, is snow-white. Upon the wall hangs a row of graduated pewter platter covers. How pathetically incongruous are they on the walls of this Canadian log house! But they shine. The table and the chairs shine. The spoons and knives and glasses and dishes shine, glitter. The whole kitchen is spotless, from the white window blinds to the white floor, and there is a glitter on every

side, from the pathetic pewter covers on the wall to the old silver teaspoons upon the table.

Mr. McPhail comes in, a small man with a quiet, husky voice and a self-respecting manner. His eye is clear and dark blue, and has a look of intellect in it. When he speaks he has a way of looking straight into you with a steady, thoughtful gaze. A man would find it equally difficult to doubt or to deceive him. The pioneer life has bowed his body and subdued his spirit, but the whole mass of his trials and the full weight of his burdens have not broken his heart's courage, nor soured its sweetness, nor dimmed his hope in God.

We are invited to tea with an

air of apologetic cordiality. The food is fit for princes—home-made bread white and flaky, butter yellow and sweet, eggs just from the nest, and cream. There is cream enough for your tea, for fruit, and to drink! Cake there is, too, and other dainties; but not for me. No cake nor dainty can tempt me from this bread and butter. Queen Victoria has not better this night. I much doubt if she has as good! God bless her!

At the head and foot of the table sit the father and mother, and Alexander, Jean, and Donald, with the missionary and myself, make up the company. The children take their tea in silence but for a whispered request now and then, or a reply to

some low-toned direction from the mother. They listen interested in their elders' talk, and hugely amused at the jokes. There is no pert interjection of smart sayings, so awful in ill-trained children of ill-bred parents. They have learned that ancient and almost forgotten doctrine that children should be seen. I tell my best stories and make my pet jokes just to see them laugh. They laugh, as they do everything else, with a gentle reserve; and occasionally Jean, a girl of fifteen, shy like the rest, pulls herself up with a blush lest she has been unduly moved to laughter. The mother presides over all with a quiet efficiency, taking keen, intelligent interest in the conversation, now and then putting a revealing ques-

tion, all the while keeping a watchful eye upon the visitors' plates lest they should come near being empty.

The talk goes back to the old times. But these people talk with difficulty when their theme is themselves. But my interest and questions draw their story from them.

Fifteen years ago the father and mother left the cozy Glasgow home and the busy life of that busy city, and came over sea and land with their little girl and baby boy to Winnipeg. There they lived for two years, till with the land-yearning in their hearts they came out from the town to this far-back spot away beyond the Marshes. Here

they cut out of the forest their home, and here they have lived amid the quiet, cool woods ever since, remote from the bustle and heat of the great world.

"Why to this place instead of to any other?" I ask.

"There was the hay from the Marshes to be sold, and the wood, too," answered the little man. "But," he went on, "I could not make much out of the wood, and I was too old to learn, so I gave it up, and went into Winnipeg to work at my trade. And, indeed," he added cheerfully, "I made very good wages of it."

I look at him and think of the day when he gave up the fight

with the wood, and came in beaten to tell his wife how he must go to the city. I know she smiled at him, her heart going down the while, and cheered him, though she was like to despair at the thought of the lonely winter. Ah, the pathos of it! Did God help them that day? Ay, and for many a day after. And may He forgive all people whose lives overflow with plenty of everything, and who fret their souls for petty ills.

Through the winter the snow piled up round the shanty where lived the little fair-haired woman and her little girl of nine years and two babies now, thinking, talking, dreaming, weeping, waiting for the spring and the home-coming of the father. One

of the horses died, and the other was sold. Their places were taken by oxen. "And the oxen are really very good; I like to work with the oxen," says the little man, with heroic Scotch philosophy and invincible content. He cannot have the best; he will make the best of what he can have. Again, may God forgive us who fling down tools because they are not the best, and refuse to work, and fret instead.

Those days are all gone, but they are not yet passed out of the life of this family. They have left their stamp on heart and character of these steadfast, gentle people, for they are a part of all that they have met.

After tea I am told that I have not yet seen Katie, and the manner of telling makes me feel that there is something in store for me. And so there is. I am taken across a narrow hall and into another room, spotless as the kitchen, the same white walls, white floor, and dainty curtains. This is Katie's room, and there upon a bed lies Katie herself. I have come into the heart of the home.

Katie is the eldest of the family. She is the little girl of nine that stayed through the long winter with the mother, and helped her with the babies inside and the beasts outside, and was the cheer and comfort of the house, while the father was away in Winnipeg, brave little girl that

she was. She is now twenty-four, and for the last nine years she has suffered from a mysterious and painful illness, and now for eighteen months she has lain upon her bed and she cannot rise. We all have in us the beast feeling that shrinks from the weak and wounded; but when I look at Katie there is no shrinking in me. Her face has not a sign of fretful weakness. It seems as if it had caught the glitter of the home, of the pewter covers, and the old silver teaspoons. It is bright. That is its characteristic. The broad brow is smooth, and the mouth, though showing the lines of suffering—what control these lines suggest!—is firm and content. The dark eyes look out from under their straight black brows

with a friendly searching. "Come near," they say; "are you to be trusted?" and you know you are being found out. But they are kindly eyes and full of peace, with none of that look in them that shows when the heart is anxious or sore. The face, the mouth, the eyes, tell the same tale of a soul that has left its storms behind and has made the haven, though not without sign of the rough weather without.

There is no sick-room feeling here. The coverlet, the sheets, the night-dress, with frills at the breast and wrists—everything about Katie is sweet and fresh. Every morning of her life she is sponged and dressed and "freshed up a bit" by her mother's loving hands. It takes an

hour to do it, and there are many household cares; but what an hour that is! What talk, what gentle, tearful jokes, what tender touches! The hour is one of sacrament to them both, for He is always there in whose presence they are reverent and glad.

We "take the books," and I am asked to be priest. One needs his holy garments in a sanctuary like this. After the evening worship is over I talk with Katie.

"Don't you feel the time long? Don't you grow weary sometimes?"

"No! Oh, no!" with slight surprise. "I am content."

"But surely you get lonely—blue now and then?"

"Lonely?" with the brightest of smiles. "Oh, no! They are all here."

Heaven forgive me! I had thought she perhaps might have wanted some of the world's cheerful distraction.

"But was it always so? Didn't you fret at the first?" I persisted.

"No, not at *the first.*"

"That means that bad times came afterwards?"

"Yes," she answers slowly, and a faint red comes up in her cheek as if from shame. "After

the first six months I found it pretty hard."

I wait, not sure what thoughts I have brought to her, and then she goes on:

"It was hard to see my mother tired with the work, and Jean could not get to school"; and she could go no further.

"But that all passed away?" I asked, after a pause.

'Oh, yes!" and her smile says much. It was the memory of her triumph that brought her smile, and it illumined her face.

My words came slowly. I could not comfort where comfort was not needed. I could

not pity, facing a smile like that; and it seemed hard to rejoice over one whose days were often full of pain. But it came to me to say:

"He has done much for you; and you are doing much for Him."

"Yes: He has done much for me." But she would go no further. Her service seemed small to her, but to me it seemed great and high. We, in our full blood and unbroken life, have our work, our common work, but this high work is not for us—we are not good enough. This He keeps for those His love makes pure by pain. This would almost make one content to suffer.

Next morning we all went to the little log school, where the Communion service was to be held—all but the father and Katie.

"You have done me much good," I could not but say before I left; "and you are a blessing in your home."

The color rose in her pale cheek, but she only said:

"I am glad you were sent to us."

Then I came away, humbly and softly, feeling as if I had been in a holy place, where I was not worthy to stand. And a holy place it will ever be to me—the white room, the spot-

less white room, lit by the glory of that bright, sweet, patient face. At the Table that day the mother's face had the same glory—the glory of those that overcome, the reflection of the glory to follow. Happy, blessed home! The snows may pile up into the bluff and the blizzards sweep over the whistling reeds of the Marshes, but nothing can chill the love or dim the hopes that warm and brighten the hearts in the little log house Beyond the Marshes, for they have their source from that high place where love never faileth and hopes never disappoint.

Date Due

JUN 11 1976			
		OCT 28 1997	
NOV 18 1982		OCT 06 1998	
		OCT 08 1998	
DEC 9 1982			
DEC 08 1988			
OCT 14 1997			
OCT 28 1997			

TRENT UNIVERSITY
0 1164 0064446 8

PS8463 .055B4 1900
Connor, Ralph, 1860-1937.
Beyond the Marshes.

DATE | ISSUED TO 244378

244378